

THE STATE OF IDAHO
"KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE"
CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS
STATEWIDE ANNUAL REPORT
2006

Idaho's "Keeping Children Safe Panels"

Recognizing the importance of public participation and community engagement, beginning in 1995, the Department of Health and Welfare organized citizen review panels in each of its seven regions to examine how Idaho's Child Protection System works and to make recommendations for improving the system. The panels have focused on providing an independent analysis of how the child protection system responds to abuse and neglect and the overall community supports for children and families in crisis.

In 1996, Congress amended the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). In its amendments to CAPTA, Congress required that, in order to receive funding for the Child Abuse and Neglect State Grants Program, states must establish the Citizen Review Panels by July of 1999. While this was the impetus for many states and their Citizen Review Panels, Idaho developed its Citizen Review Panels several years prior to the requirement.

Idaho's Citizen Review Panels have elected to call themselves Keeping Children Safe Panels. Throughout Idaho, most of the panels meet monthly, review cases of child abuse and neglect, attend child fatality reviews, go to court, and observe the implementation of Department policies and procedures as they interact with families and other agencies. Once a year the panels submit a report of their collective experiences, findings and recommendations to the Director of the Department of Health and Welfare.

There are approximately sixty (60) Keeping Children Safe Panel members in Idaho. Once a year, they meet together to review their activities, share ideas, and receive additional training. Each panel member serves up to eight hours a month. These citizen volunteers have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to Idaho's children and a willingness to involve themselves in the work of making our communities safer for children.

On October 20, 2006, during their annual statewide meeting, the Keeping Children Safe Panel members discussed their regional issues and concerns. Their findings are summarized in the following *Keeping Children Safe Statewide Panel Recommendations 2006 Report*.

**KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE PANELS
2007 STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS**

I. PREVENTION

As a Citizen Review Panel for Idaho, we are committed to the reinstatement of the Community Resources for Families Program (CRFF) in local schools as an effective preventative program for Idaho families. We believe this is an essential way to provide early intervention services to families in the community setting, to help them help themselves. These services have been proven to be very effective in increasing child well-being, school readiness, and family self-reliance.

Recommendation:

- 1. We recommend the Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) continue active efforts to advocate to obtain dedicated funding reallocated to DHW to restore Community Resource Workers in all local school districts.**

II. EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT

We are concerned about educational neglect. There is currently no accountability to be certain that some children are receiving adequate education who are not enrolled in school. We understand opposition of some home educators concerning their individual rights. However, while we applaud those home-schooled students who often receive superior education, we remain alarmed that home-schooling provides an opportunity for neglectful parents to hide their children from the public. We are concerned about:

- a. Children who may be kept home to avoid detection of abuse; and
- b. Children who are not given adequate education opportunities.

Given the results from the BSU (Boise State University) report "Educational Neglect and Compulsory Schooling in Idaho," there are 13,954 reasons to take action.

The 2,921 Idaho dropouts from the academic year 2002-2003, will generate a net loss of between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion to the Idaho economy over their work careers.

Less than half of Idaho school districts were able to estimate the number of home-educated children within their districts. For the 2001-2002 school year, nearly 680,000 students attended more than 2,700 charter schools.

Recommendation:

- 2. We recommend the DHW partner with SDE (State Department of Education) and the Home School Association to ensure that all children in Idaho are receiving an adequate education by defining educational neglect and developing a standardized monitoring and testing system.**

III. FOSTER CARE

The panel would like to see the State incorporate higher standards and guidelines for foster care licensing. Statewide consistency is needed when making determinations about safety during the licensure process, specific to potential water hazards (i.e. above-ground and in-ground swimming pools, safety covers or approved fencing options, hot tubs, ditches, fish ponds, portable wading pools, etc.).

Additionally, Idaho is currently 47th in foster care reimbursement. To increase the financial support for resource families to mirror the national average reimbursement rate we suggest implementing an annual cost of living (cola) increase. This cola will mirror current calculations done for other government programs.

The panel would like to also see, as opportunities become available, emergency response training provided to resource parents to better prepare them to care for foster children. An example would be at the annual foster care conference where CPR was offered this past year. There may also be service organizations locally that can offer this training. The

emotional and social needs of biological children of resource families can be overlooked during the foster care program. It would be helpful to provide meaningful training for them.

Lastly, Senator Brent Hill has expressed an interest in a college tuition assistance program for foster children, and plans to present legislation toward this goal. The FYI (Foster Youth Idaho) also endorses this proposal. The Department should advocate for successful outcome.

Recommendations:

3. **The panel recommends the development of more specific rules or standards about water safety requirements for evaluating safety of the home environment of resource families; annual in-home review of resource family facility; provide clear definition in rules or standards about the kind of supervision required for children in and around any approved water feature.**
4. **The panel recommends the Department of Health and Welfare continue to advocate for an increase in funds for foster care reimbursement, training and support resources.**
5. **We recommend the addition of the following items into resource family training:**
 - a. **Emergency response training to include CPR, first aid, and Heimlich.**
 - b. **Training and support for children of foster families.**
6. **We recommend that legislation be sought to offer free in-state college tuition or vocational training for foster children who have been in care for at least 3 months who were age 15 or older.**

IV. CHILD CARE

The panel recognizes that childcare is a parents' choice. The panel would like to see the State incorporate higher standards and guidelines for our daycare licensing. If the law were enhanced, it would provide better care for Idaho's children. It would help deny pedophiles access to Idaho's children by establishing unlicensed day cares, provide parents assurance of quality in the same sense that medical doctors and even contractors are licensed. It would also assure that a vast amount of unreported income would be reported for tax purposes.

Recommendations:

7. **We recommend strengthening licensing requirements and mandatory licensing of all day care and childcare facilities caring for 2 or more children outside of their family.**
8. **The panel recommends mandatory fingerprinting and background checks on all childcare providers and request that both are reviewed annually and background checks are required annually.**
9. **The panel recommends mandatory home inspections for cleanliness and safety.**
10. **The panel recommends revising the day care, foster homes, residential care provider, childcare agencies, and developmental disability agencies licensing rules to include "once a license has been revoked, no new license will be issued for one year." We would like to see a response regarding the specifics of a plan of implementation by January 2007.**
11. **We recommend the Department identify a Program Specialist to administer the daycare-licensing program.**

V. TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Caseworkers are taxiing and running errands when they could be spending time with children and their families. By adding Transportation Technicians, there would be better utilization of the caseworker, better time management, and more quality time for families.

The requirements for family connections are often difficult to achieve because of separation caused by distance, treatment facilities, incarceration or safety of the child. We believe we can better meet standards and preserve family connections, in the best interest of the child, if technology is put to use in this matter.

Recommendations:

- 12. The panel recommends the Department create the position of Transportation Technician to better utilize the time of social workers and promote family reunification.**
- 13. We recommend the DHW research the use of and implementation of videophones and camera-equipped computers (internet video cameras) as an option for preserving family connections. Example – for use with incarcerated parents, and with Interstate Compacts.**

VI. CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

The panel continues to be concerned about access to mental health services for children and ongoing quality issues of those services. Due to the rural geographic areas the Department serves, a mobile unit (i.e. bookmobile), to outlying areas would enable children and families easier access to mental health services in their own communities.

Recognizing that many of the concerns about the PSR process providing research based, and clinically sound practices, is founded, the PSR providers should perform a periodic, uniform, internal audit that addresses:

- a. Training and qualification of staff
- b. Case reviews
- c. Outcomes of cases
- d. Duration of services by clinical issues.

These audits will be performed quarterly.

Recommendations:

- 14. CMH mobile resources – The panel recommends a pilot program in one region using a mobile "RV office" to bring mental health services to more rural areas.**
- 15. We recommend DHW include in their contracts, i.e. provider agreements, the requirement of the contracted provider to have an "internal auditor" charged with submitting a standardized quarterly report to DHW addressing the use and accountability of their PSR providers.**

VII. FAMILY COURTS

The panels recognize the continuing court/legal struggles, both with adequate legal representation and overloaded court dockets. Currently, the child protection committee is advocating for a court model of "one judge – one family." This means that the same judge would hear all types of cases in which a family is involved.

Recommendation:

- 16. We recommend the Department continue to advocate for the implementation of a Family Court system that allows judges and attorneys to focus in the area of child welfare and family issues.**

VIII. SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Substance abuse is the primary issue affecting the safety and well-being of Idaho's children. Methamphetamine use is causing a domino effect that is taxing our Health and Welfare system. There is an urgent need to raise public awareness about the devastating effect drugs have on prenatal infants who are exposed, as well as on children who are neglected by drug addicted parents. The state foster care system is filled with children whose lives have been directly and indirectly affected by drug use. There is an urgent need for local treatment and education throughout the State of Idaho.

Recommendation:

- 17. We recommend DHW develop a tracking system within its existing information system to track the number of children who enter foster care directly related to substance abuse by parents/caretakers, or direct exposure, and explore treatment options for the entire family.**

IX. REGIONAL ISSUES

The following are not statewide recommendations, but are continuing recommendations panels would like to present to be addressed within their regions.

- **Caseload Distribution** – The panel would like to see the Department distributing cases to caseworkers based on their level of experience and training. The level of a caseworker's experience and training should be reflected in their title (for example: SWI, SWII, etc.). Caseworkers should be compensated based on each level. This would help with retention and more experience within the Health and Welfare system.
- **Storage** – The panel would like to see the storage problems within the Department to be addressed. Many of the children's belongings are still sitting in bags and boxes with no utilization. We would like to see a time limit incorporated and an action plan with these items. So many items (that are not personal or have sentimental value) could be donated to other parts of the community to avoid the waste of storage.
- **Operation Suitcase**-- the panel proposes that a program known as Operation Suitcase continue to be promoted by the Regions as a way of support to children taken into care.
- **Knowledge of Community Resources** – There are sufficient programs available to help most families. However, it is critical that families receive correct referrals. Therefore, the function of the Community Resource Workers and the DHW Navigation Unit are an important asset in assisting families. The knowledge of community

resources gained by Child Protection staff is also an important asset to the Department and the community.

Thank you to the following **Keeping Children Safe Panel** members.

Region I

Jim McCuaig – KCS Chair
Verna Gabel – KCS Co-Chair
Wilfred Ross
Beverly McCuaig
Claudia Burtelow
Mary Vail
Susan Edwards
Elena Bottarini
Ralph Kennedy – DHW Liaison
Wendy Nutting – DHW Support

Region II

Doris Ferguson – KCS Chair
Jean Roberts
Judy Hanby
Lura Abbott
Douglas Giddings
Scott Everett
Dee Dee Arnzen
Gaylene Strandbakke – DHW
Brad Forth – DHW
Mary Jo Murdie – DHW Liaison

Region III

Dyann Aspiazu – Co-Chair
Lorri Robb – Co-Chair
Vivienne Bristol
Arleen Volgamore
Shelia Leavitt
Dawn Baldwin
Andrea Parsons
Russ Schroeder – DHW Liaison

Region IV

Londa Graham – Co-Chair
Charlotte Larson – Co-Chair
Robert Specht
Tom Turco
Donna Parks
Mary Stackle
Elizabeth Kidd
Sheri Conrad – DHW Liaison
Sara Shultz – DHW Support

Region V

Wes Fields – KCS Chair
Georginna Wolverton
Midge Fisher
Lorie Nebeker
Jaime Nava – DHW Liaison

Region VI

Charlie Piquet – KCS Chair
Carol Dawn Willey
Steve Ugaki
Glenda Piquet
Grant Thomas – DHW Liaison

Region VII

Renee Hill – KCS Chair
Janice McNee
Julie Hill
Gene Lund
Howard Carroll
Melinda Drowns
Marlene Bubar – DHW Liaison
Cheryl Taylor – DHW Support

KCS Statewide Panel Activities during 2006:

- Regional KCS panels participated in developing their own "Operation Backpack," or learned more about existing programs of this type in their regions.
- Regional KCS panel members attended DHW staffings, and participated in multi-disciplinary meetings, and CMH councils.
- Several KCS panel members participated in regional Child Fatality Reviews.
- Panel members advocated with political leaders and local community and private agency leaders regarding KCS issues and recommendations.
- Panel members attended CQI training, allowing them to be current and future "reviewers" for ongoing regional Continuous Quality Improvement reviews.
- Panel members actively participated in regional CQI reviews.
- The Region II panel applied for and received an Idaho Trust Fund Grant. They used the grant resources to sponsor the Teen Parent Conference.

- Region II members put together Thank You cards and mailed them to all foster parents in their region.
- Panel members shadowed caseworkers to home visits, and attended court proceedings.
- Panel members received and presented training on teen suicide.
- Panel members reviewed case files and made recommendations to the Department.
- Regional panel members have attended Service Integration meetings.
- Panel members have attended regional Foster Parent Support Groups.
- Region IV panel members have continued to conduct "exit interviews" with social workers, and provide retention recommendations to the Program Manager.
- Regional panels reviewed DHW existing and proposed rule changes.
- Regional panels reviewed pertinent issues such as transportation and accountability for PSR providers.
- Region VII's panel was presented with a certificate of thanks by the Bonneville Youth Council for their work in the community.
- Regional panels provided outreach throughout the state to inform communities and other organizations about programs and services for children.
- Regional panels reviewed Children and Family Services State Comprehensive Plan.

KCS Panel Regional Meetings in 2006:

- Regional panels invited a large variety of speakers to present at panel meetings throughout the year.
 - Department staff, supervisors, Program Managers and Regional Directors
 - Representatives from other organizations that provide "Operation Backpack" type services
 - Substance abuse counselors
 - Service organization leaders
 - Community program organizers and leaders
 - University representatives from across the state
 - Local law enforcement
 - Local Deputy Attorneys General

Training and Conferences in 2006:

- Regional panels participated in a variety of local, statewide, and national training and conferences throughout the year.
 - Youth Summit
 - National Citizen Review Panel Conference
 - Jason Foundation training on teen suicide
 - CQI Training
 - Pride Training for Resource Families
 - The Governor's Round Table
 - 4th Annual Foster Care Conference
 - Family Group Decision Making training